

CLEANTH BROOKS

Yale University

Faulkner and the Muse of History*

PERHAPS I'D BEST BEGIN by justifying my title. It may impress you as a rather pointless intrusion of classical clap-trap. What had that earthy person, William Faulkner, to do with such ethereal creatures as Greek goddesses? Well, on the level of mere content, the truth is that if you look at Faulkner's early poetry you will find that he had a great deal to do with the minor Greek deities—fauns, nymphs, dryads, and such. But as for the means by which Faulkner received his inspiration, I won't insist on the ancient Greek way of accounting for it. Nowadays, most of us prefer to speak of the artist's unconscious self, or of his inner voice, or of an unsuspected psychic energy that surges up from the depths of his being, or of what the poet Yeats called man's demonic self. The term doesn't matter. The muse by any other name can still leave the artist *bemused*, caught up in a vision that seems to come from sources outside his conscious mind. Such a rush of power—call it whatever you like—did possess William Faulkner. Think of that tide of psychic energy that flowed through him from 1929 to 1942.

Faulkner's first, and obvious, flirtation with a muse was his affair with Erato, the muse of lyric poetry, to whom he addressed himself as a young man. Nothing of great consequence, it has to be admitted, ever came of it. It was soon after that courtship ended that Erato's older and, I should think, more homely sister, Clio, took over. In saying "took over," I'm being careful of my language, for it was not so much Faulkner's seeking her aid as becoming overshadowed by her presence. True, Clio did not inspire in him works of formal history—rather, a mythical history, the history of a county that does not appear on the maps issued by Rand-McNally or at a Texaco filling sta-

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tion. But mythical history has a relation to formal history. When it comes from the mind of genius, it may even improve upon official history.

In stressing Faulkner's commitment to the history of a particular place, I do not mean to deny his universality or his pertinence to readers of today. Nevertheless, Faulkner the artist was not a timeless essence nor a universal substance. He was born at a particular time and place, and, his personal genius notwithstanding, his time and place have their importance if we want to understand him.

I'm quite aware, of course, that one can cite statements from Faulkner himself that seem to play down the importance of his Southern heritage and to discount any special Southern angle of vision in his contemplation of the world. For instance, Faulkner told students at the University of Virginia that he had simply been interested in writing about people, and that he had very properly decided to write about the ones that he knew best, those around him. The statement is becomingly modest and it is true enough. The aim of the genuine artist always is to dramatize the human condition, not to plead a cause or to set forth a thesis—not to moralize or to propagandize. Moreover, one certainly can't quarrel with the wisdom of Faulkner's decision to write about what he knew best. But the implications of writing about what one really knows are in fact large and significant. The people that Faulkner knew were hunters around campfires with tales of the big woods; Confederate veterans with their reminiscences of *the War*; poor whites like Anse Bundren; decayed gentlewomen like Miss Emily Grierson; black servants like Molly Beauchamp and Dilsey. In sum, the people that he knew had clinging to their lives a great deal of the stuff of history—the history that had produced them and had helped mold the culture out of which they came.

As for the nature of that culture: it was a culture characterized by concrete, highly personal relationships. It harbored a genuine distrust of abstractions of every kind. The family was central to it; and family and clan obligations were powerful. On occasion, they could prove painfully oppressive. There was a tradition of manners *and* violence. In a society characterized

by close personal relations, if you offended someone, it had better be by intention. Otherwise, you had better mind your manners, for slights and insults could hardly be concealed and would certainly be fiercely resented. The old code of honor in one form or another was still very much alive.

Faulkner's culture incorporated, as we all know, a quite rigid black-white caste system; nevertheless, there was a real sense of community—or perhaps it would be accurate to say that there were two real communities, which, in any case, shared a good many basic values. For both, religion tended to be an accepted part of life, though the religion in question ranged all the way from a rather tepid low-church Episcopalianism, through the various modes of evangelical Protestantism, on down—or up—to the ecstatic foot-stomping and convulsive shaking of the Holy Rollers.

Faulkner's culture was basically agricultural, traditional, and steeped in history. Unlike the non-Southern areas of the United States, it had lost a war. It had experienced at first hand war's ravages and the consequences, economic and political, of military and political defeat. The memories of the defeated are always long memories, whether in Ireland or in Dixie.

I shall not go on to particularize further, for most of you in this room know as much about Southern culture as I do. To save time, I shall stress only one feature of it: the sense of history that Faulkner derived from his culture.

I could use the highfalutin phrase "Faulkner's philosophy of history," but Faulkner's ghost would reprove me: to him the term *philosophy* would have seemed pretentious. Yet a sense of history is most important. It is the product of the vicissitudes undergone by the culture and a determining influence on man's attitudes toward the future and toward the nature of reality itself.

If, however, I am to concentrate on the topic of history, I had best try to deal at once with the stubborn misapprehensions that tend to dog this subject. A sense of history does not necessarily imply reverence for the past, mere fear of change, an antiquarian's stodgy disparagement of present-day reality, or

some nostalgic yearning for vanished glories. But to clarify my position in this matter, and to clarify what I take to be Faulkner's, will require at least a brief consideration of *change*, the *past*, the *nature of history*, and the *nature of myth*.

It's all quite a tangle. I'm afraid we have to thank the present state of American education for that. But regardless of who is responsible for the tangle, the authors of a good many books and articles on Faulkner have got themselves involved in it. I think I ought to know, because for the last three months I've been steadily reading Faulkner scholarship and criticism.

Writers on Faulkner's works never tire of telling us that what is unchanging is not only passive but dead and inert, and, that therefore change is the very principle of life and vitality. Now there is an element of truth in such observations—namely that change is part of the process of growth in all living organisms and that change is a symptom that the organism is alive. But it is a careless, not to say a specious, logic which arrives at the conclusion that change is necessarily good.

History deals out change in all shapes and sizes, all the way from the change in one's wife's hairdo to the fall of the Roman Empire. To welcome all change as good represents a foolish optimism. Even the change in one's wife hairdo *could* be a change for the worse. What Faulkner constantly reprehended was something very different: the failure to cope with change.

To be unwilling to face up to change, or unable to cope with change is to bury one's head, ostrich-like, in the sands of the past. One remembers characters like Faulkner's Quentin Compson or Gail Hightower. Their addiction to the sheer pastness of the past did prove disastrous.

To isolate the past from the present and from the future is to falsify the very nature of time. It was a fallacy in which some of Faulkner's characters indulged, but never Faulkner himself. The authentic human being lives in the past and future as well as in the present. Indeed, the present as such is an abstraction—an arbitrary knife-edge, over which time future constantly moves into its condition of time past. How long is the present: a year, a week, a day, a half-hour, a split second?

Faulkner was quite as clear-headed on this matter as St. Augustine, who makes the point in his *Confessions*, or T. S. Eliot, who makes the same point in his *Four Quartets*. The past does continue to live in the present, not only in the sense that it is alive in our memories, but also because we ourselves, and our very capacity to remember, have been shaped by the past. Gavin Stevens does not always express Faulkner's own opinions and beliefs, but when he says, as he does more than once, that "There's no such thing as past . . .," surely he voices Faulkner's own conviction.

A man who lives only in the past, like Quentin or Hightower, is not fully alive. But then neither is a man like Jason Compson, who repudiates the past and lives only in future expectations. *The Sound and the Fury* presents a third mode of incomplete human life, that of the third brother, Benjy. Since Benjy, the idiot, cannot distinguish between past and present and has no real prevision of the future, he lives virtually at the animal level—is barely human.

Considerations of this kind lead us to a definition of history as the specifically human realm. Creatures at the animal level truly have no history. Possessing almost no memory and no sense of the future, birds and beasts live in what is to all intents and purposes a timeless present. Their basic drives and responses to their environment are largely instinctual. They are so deeply immersed in nature, they so completely lack man's self-consciousness, that they are barred out of the realm of purposes and responsibilities, which constitute the realm of history.

W. H. Auden puts this very well in a short poem entitled "Their Lonely Betters." As the poet sits in his garden, he notes the oddly beautiful "inhumanity" of nature. The robin sings his fool-proof song. It's the only song the robin knows and so he cannot vary it, but then neither can he sound a false note or sing off-key. But what principally separates all the other mortal creatures from man is their lack of language. Now, this lack of words gives them some advantages. They are, for example, incapable of lying. They cannot break—since they cannot make—promises. Thus, they do not suffer man's sense of anxiety and guilt. In short, they cannot enter into the realm of good and

evil, that peculiarly human realm of choice and responsibility. In Auden's terms, that world is the domain of history as distinguished from the domain of nature. Man, of course, lives—it is both his curse and his glory—in *both* realms: he is truly an amphibian.

Auden is here, of course, using the word *history* in a special sense, to describe the human experience as opposed to that of pure nature. Most of us use the word *history* in a more specific sense: we mean the record, oral or written, of what has happened in the life of a people or a civilization. Yet, since history is possible only to a self-conscious creature like man, a creature who can remember and who can try to interpret the meaning of his past, the quality and complexity of recorded history will obviously differ somewhat from culture to culture, with the extent of its knowledge of the past, and the nature of its world view. It will be difficult to find a truly objective history containing no element of emotional and subjective bias.

Indeed, the history of certain primitive tribes is more accurately described as being mythic rather than truly historical. If their experience as a tribe has been little more than the cyclic round of "birth, copulation, and death," with no epochal events, no crises, no turning points—if their history seems to be going nowhere in particular—it will not be so very different from the "history" of Auden's unself-conscious birds and beasts—that is, it will be no history at all. It may amount to not much more than a cosmic myth, telling how the universe began and the story of a heroic eponymous ancestor whose descendants are the members of the present tribe.

Yet, though civilized man sometimes looks with a patronizing scorn on the mythic histories of primitive peoples, it is difficult to eliminate from any history the element of myth. Popular history is usually heavily tintured with myth. We often wage our wars and define our political objectives largely in terms of myths. Our professional historians are thus set a difficult task: to try to eliminate at least the more fanciful myths, and to ground history, as nearly as possible, on fact; and yet to provide an interpretation of history—not just a dry chronicle

of facts—something that will possess the dynamics of myth even though based on actual happenings.

With this observation one can return to the matter of Faulkner's attitude toward the Southern past and to the charge—still sometimes made—that his fiction veered dangerously toward a celebration of what enlightened people now know was merely a myth—the account of a fabulous Old South that never really existed. (A variant of this view, heard much more often today, does not condemn Faulkner for celebrating the Southern myth, but congratulates him for exposing its shoddy pretensions. See, for example, F. G. Davenport's recent book, *The Myth of Southern History*.)

What is common to both these views is their confident assumption that the critic of the Southern myth stands on firm historical ground and is bringing solid truth to bear upon a flimsy fairytale. I suggest that the situation is somewhat different: that in contests of this sort we usually find, *not* truth confronting falsehood, or history confronting mere myth, but rather a struggle between two myths. For there is in addition to the myth of the Old South, the American myth—its more respectable name is The American Dream—and to the charge that the Southern myth erred by describing its past as golden, one might point out that the American myth has consistently insisted that its future is golden. If a 24-carat golden past is just too good to be true, a golden future, never quite here, always about to be, may not pan out either. Both kinds of gold may turn out, in the end, to be fool's gold. If it is dangerous to glamorize the past because one's future is dark or uncertain, the reverse process may falsify quite as much: to gild the future because the past is drab and unsatisfactory.

I am not suggesting, of course, that we are condemned to either alternative, though the American myth has applied a more-or-less constant pressure on this either-or choice. Thus, in his day Emerson divided the American intellectuals into those who belonged to the Party of Memory and those who belonged to the Party of Hope. In doing so, he offered a false option, for there is not the slightest reason why a writer like Faulkner, who remembers, should thereby forfeit his right to be hopeful—

unless, of course, one assumes that one is forced to choose between losing his memory and losing his hope. In a world of such mad choices as that, a man might as well lose his mind too and be done with it.

Let me say at once that Faulkner participated in both myths, that of the Old South and that of America. As an American, Faulkner felt the attraction of the American dream, particularly as it is expressed in the opening sentences of the Declaration of Independence—the promise of freedom, equality, and the right of the individual to pursue his own notion of the good life. But, as I have earlier hinted, Faulkner was no Emersonian—nor was he a Whitmanian, rejoicing in the promiscuous bonhomie of urban crowds. Faulkner was more realistic—some would say more pessimistic—about the general cantankerousness of human nature and the difficulties of directing the course of history—even of *predicting* its outcome. To be sure, he never quite despaired of man, but neither was he buoyantly optimistic about man's future. In 1955—some several years after his Nobel Prize speech—he observed in a letter to a friend: “. . . human beings are terrible. One must believe well in man to endure him, wait out his folly and savagery and inhumanity.” Faulkner did “believe well in man,” but his was no naive belief. It was a hard-won faith.

I shall return in a few minutes to further consideration of Faulkner's estimate of what had happened to the American dream as the nation achieved might and power, and his estimate of the future of that dream. But for the moment I want to make some observations on Faulkner's view of the history of the South. If he was willing to criticize the American myth, he was also willing to criticize the myth that he had inherited from his family and local community. Indeed, Faulkner's picture of the antebellum South is no gilded dream. It is a solid world set firmly upon the earth. He finds Southerners of the time both good and bad, with the usual human mixture of vices and virtues. He is, for example, essentially realistic in his account of slavery. If his novels of the older time show us some callous and inhuman masters, they show others who were basically honorable and decent men. As for the master's sexual exploitation of female

slaves, Faulkner in his novels presents a situation actually worse than the historical facts warrant—that is, if we are to trust the authors of the recent book *Time on the Cross*, who argue that the ravishment of female slaves by their masters was rather infrequent. In having both Thomas Sutpen and Old Carothers McCaslin beget mulatto children, Faulkner, of course, was not undertaking to write history, but to serve his own dramatic and fictional purposes. My point is simply that if we insist on reading Faulkner's novels as literal history, we have to admit that he has, in this matter, not been engaged in burnishing the image of the Old South, or portraying it as better than it was.

To move on to other levels of antebellum society: Faulkner depicts a yeomanry which possessed dignity and sturdy virtues. Poorer whites, who had been pretty well beaten down and damaged by a hard and brutal life, are treated with compassion, as are the blacks, whose humanity and basic decency have, in Faulkner's account, survived their condition of servitude.

The history of this society, as Faulkner depicts it, is tragic—tragic in Aristotle's sense of the term. In his *Poetics*, the Father of Criticism pointed out that you can't make a tragic hero out of a base and contemptible man. The tragic hero must be literally "worth killing." Though he has a tragic flaw, he possesses real virtues; otherwise the evocation of pity and terror that Aristotle regards as the hall-mark of genuine tragedy could not occur. For Faulkner, the tragic flaw of the South was its harboring of chattel slavery, yet the slaveholders, and in general the soldiers of the Confederacy, many of whom were not slaveholders, were essentially brave and decent men. That was why, for Faulkner, the collapse of the Old South was authentically tragic.

I believe that Faulkner's general account of the antebellum South is in such respects pretty well vindicated by the studies published in the last decades by historians of the quality of Eugene Genovese and C. Vann Woodward. I am thinking of such works as Genovese's *The World the Slaveholders Made* and *The Political Economy of Slavery*, and of Vann Woodward's essays in *The Burden of Southern History* and *American Counterpoint*.

I have been talking about the myth of the Old South and of Faulkner's attitude toward it. I want to turn now to the Ameri-

can myth, with special reference to its justification of war and its concept of progress. Presumably Faulkner believed in wars of self-defense but did not have much faith in holy wars—that is, wars to end war, or wars fought to make the world safe for democracy—in short, ideological wars—the only kind of war that America has ever fought—or at least the only kind that most of us Americans are willing to own up to. Faulkner was skeptical of wars waged to effect utopian solutions, possibly because his own people had been on the losing side of such a war. From that experience, if not elsewhere, he had learned how mixed are the true motives that send nations to war and how twisted away from the North's declared objectives were the actual consequences of the Civil War.

This is not, of course, all that is to be said about Faulkner on the subject of war. He was obviously proud that his great-grandfather commanded a regiment on Stonewall Jackson's left at First Manassas, and he evidently took a great deal of satisfaction in the four years' fight put up by the outnumbered and outgunned South. He even found a certain glamor in some aspects of war—not only in the exploits of Confederate cavalymen like Miss Jenny Du Pre's brother Bayard, but in the careers of the fighter pilots in World War I—he tried very hard to become one of those pilots.

Yet apart from the single-combat exploits of the fighter-pilots, Faulkner looked at modern war with a cold and quizzical eye. He was sickened by its waste and appalled by its mechanical and bureaucratic impersonality. In "Turnabout," the American captain of a bombing plane succeeds in demolishing a chateau which is being used by the German high command. He takes great risks in doing so and accordingly is cited for his "extraordinary valor"; but as the bombs are released over the chateau, he thinks: "'God! God! If they were all there—all the generals, the admirals, the presidents and the kings—theirs, ours—all of them.'" True, this is what Captain Bogard thinks, not necessarily what his creator, William Faulkner thought, but Faulkner's other fiction on World War I, notably *A Fable*, is generally consonant with Bogard's feelings. I'm not suggesting that Faulkner was either a pacifist or an anarchist. He obviously believed that we had to get into the fight against Hitler. But one supposes that

he could not give most wars much higher justification than "necessary evils," and clearly what made modern warfare peculiarly monstrous was the fact of its inhuman abstractness.

An essential feature of the American myth is the concept of perpetual progress. Did Faulkner believe in progress? No, I would say: not in general progress and not, in any case, in inevitable progress. I've tried to choose my words carefully here. In specific areas, great improvements clearly had been made. I assume that Faulkner was as grateful as I am for modern medicine and modern dentistry, probably as ungrateful for the invention of the telephone. Our technical progress has indeed been immense, and Faulkner did not despise it. As a young man he had fallen in love with one of the fascinating new machines provided by the twentieth century—the airplane, a love that was life-long. His boyhood love for the early automobile is the subject of his last novel—the heroic saga of a journey over the dirt roads of Mississippi. Faulkner did not on principle hate and fear machines. Science and technology put at man's disposal powerful and efficient means to accomplish his ends. But was man becoming wiser in the choice of the ends to be sought? Was his value system improving?

Here, Faulkner seems to me much more cautious. Such things as the abolition of slavery obviously had to be put down as pure gain. But in general, human nature was not clearly getting better and better, and what was more ominous, there seemed to be little relation between the enormous increase in man's power to control nature and his ability or willingness to control himself. Faulkner would not have been among those who ask, "If we can put a man on the moon why can't we solve the problems of poverty and injustice?" In fact, the rise of technology, the growth of cities, and the increasing abstraction of life threatened to rob man of his humanity and of his status as an individual, reducing him to what a modern poet has called the "unknown citizen," the unadulterated, unimportant, undivine average.

Much more pertinent to my argument with reference to progress and to the realization of the American Dream is an essay that Faulkner published in 1955. The title is "On Privacy,"

but it also has a subtitle which reads: "The American Dream: What Happened to It?" Faulkner guarded his privacy jealously, and when *Life* magazine proposed to do an article on him, eventually published in 1953 as "The Private World of William Faulkner," he was outraged. He begged the editors to desist, maintaining that he had a right to keep his personal life to himself—but to no avail.

In his essay "On Privacy," however, Faulkner sought to rise above his personal problem. He pointed to the invasion of the privacy of people whom he modestly named more important than himself—citizens like Charles Lindbergh or the atomic scientist, Robert Oppenheimer. Moreover, as the subtitle of the essay indicated, the invasion of privacy was, quite apart from the damage to individuals, a symptom of something very serious, the degradation and corruption of the basic ideas on which the Republic had been founded. For if a powerful corporation, under the excuse that it was merely exercising a sacred right, the freedom of the press, could violate at will an individual's private life, then what had happened to the rights proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence? Had freedom been invoked for the protection of commercial companies and corporations, or for the individual citizen? Faulkner is forced to the sad conclusion that "the American air, which was once the living breath of liberty [has] now become one vast down-crowding pressure to abolish [freedom], by destroying man's individuality. . . ."

America had not lived up to the promises that the Founding Fathers had made to themselves and to the generations that were to succeed them. The end of the Southern dream of independence had been at least tragic. But the American Dream could not even claim the dignity of a tragic fate if it were simply eroded away by commercial greed and public indifference to that greed.

I shall risk obscuring my main point, however, if I stress too much the matter of Faulkner's belief that the American dream on a particular issue had been betrayed. Much more important was Faulkner's skepticism about the full realization of *any* utopian dream, even the noblest. That is to say, Faulkner was even more seriously concerned that his country might be undone by her sometimes overweening faith in the future, by her belief

that progress was inevitable, by her confidence that man's happiness would result from sociological know-how and the right set of plans, by her reliance on her technological might, by her incautious trust in her own virtue and good intentions, and, most dangerous of all, by her unprecedented record of military victories. (Remember that Faulkner died before Americans went to Vietnam.) Americans could easily get the impression that they, unlike the other nations of the earth, were immune to defeat, loss, and evil. Such naiveté, such dangerous innocence, might prove disastrous.

The Southern history of tragic defeat that Faulkner had inherited acted to qualify somewhat the myth of American innocence and success that he had also legitimately inherited. But now another point and another question: Has Faulkner been alone among American writers in warning against this dangerous innocence? Was it his personal idiosyncrasy rather than a regional trait? In other words, can it be found in other Southern writers? I see it as part of his Southern heritage, and as proof I cite other Southern writers who, in their various degrees, share in this trait: Katherine Anne Porter, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, and Andrew Lytle. One could add other names—for example those of Eudora Welty, John Crowe Ransom, and Walker Percy. Could any non-Southerners be found? I think so. The list would be shorter and would go back to an earlier time, but it would include some very great names—that of Nathaniel Hawthorne, probably; that of Herman Melville, certainly.

Now what about writers outside the United States? Do they find Americans susceptible to utopian ideas? Yes, many do. Allow me to call the name of George Santayana, who could view Americans from the stance of both outsider and insider. Santayana was of Spanish ancestry, but he came to this country early, taught for many years at Harvard, and became one of our most distinguished philosophers and men of letters. He loved his adopted country and admired its virtues, such as its youthful vigor and its boundless energy, but his view of history and reality was essentially that of the Latin civilization of the Mediterranean world. The ideas of Santayana, who refused to predict that civilization was moving toward some fabulous future ideal,

sometimes disturbed his New England friends and colleagues. I dare say that Santayana never read Faulkner, but had he, I make no doubt that he would have recognized in Faulkner's novels a traditional view—indeed, an essentially Old World view—of man and of his history.

Let me mention also Maurice Coindreau, a Frenchman who knows this country well, having taught for years at Princeton University, and who is in every sense a friendly critic. I invoke his name the more readily because he knew Faulkner and is probably the most distinguished of Faulkner's translators. In the course of one of his essays, he comments upon the strange fact that so many Americans are baffled by Faulkner's work. Coindreau tells of meeting a lady who gave up trying to read *Absalom, Absalom!* because "the story was just too horrible." M. Coindreau reminded her that the title comes from the story of "Absalom, Ammon, and their sister Tamar, just as one finds it in the Book of Kings," and went on to ask her, "You read your Bible, don't you?" Her reply was: "Oh, yes I do. But it is not the same thing at all. You see, we're used to things like that in the Bible."

Coindreau comments: "She should have added that Biblical personages—like the heroes of mythology—are not citizens of free America, not people who are virtuous by definition. . . ." "Not people who are virtuous by definition"! Here we have it again, an amused but not unkindly glance at the American myth.

Lest you think that I exaggerate, or that Coindreau has made up his story about the lady who was not disturbed by wicked Biblical characters but refused to accept the same behavior in authentic Americans, let me quote a paragraph from an editorial in the *New York Times*. The editorial in question had to do with the Nobel Prize, which Faulkner had just received.

[Faulkner's] field of vision is concentrated on a society that is too often vicious, depraved, decadent, corrupt. Americans must fervently hope that the award by a Swedish jury and the enormous vogue of Faulkner's works in Latin America and on the European Continent, especially in France, does not mean that foreigners admire him because he gives them the picture of American life they believe to be typical and true. There has been too much of

that feeling lately, again especially in France. Incest and rape may be common pastimes in Faulkner's "Jefferson, Miss." but they are not elsewhere in the United States.

Alas, for the pious concluding sentence; now, twenty-five years later, the annual number of rapes—and of murders—in New York has to be reckoned in three figures—or is it four? For confirmation, consult the *New York Times*.

My aim, however, is not to excite laughter over a melancholy fact, of which all Americans ought to be ashamed. It is rather to call attention to the hardihood of the American myth and, incidentally, to provide a further illustration of the way in which Faulkner, in his effort to tell the truth about reality, necessarily fell afoul of those who refused to face that truth.

Robert Penn Warren has pointed out that the upsurge in Faulkner's popularity occurred after World War II, perhaps because men returning from that war were fed up with "simple, two-dimensional views of the world," for many of them had had "a shocking acquaintance with the depths and paradoxes of experience, and now literary renderings that did not honor their experience were not for them." Warren goes on to say that the returning G.I.'s view of the world may have had something in common with "that of the Japanese, French, and Italians . . . , who [also] took his fiction to their hearts. It can, perhaps, be plausibly argued that Faulkner is one of the few contemporary fiction writers—perhaps the only American—whose work is to any considerable degree concerned with the central issues of our time, who really picks at the scab of our time, in the way that, in varying degrees of intensity and scale, Melville, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Conrad, Proust, Eliot, Yeats, and Camus, also do."

In putting Faulkner in this distinguished and international list, Warren places him exactly where he ought to be. Not in spite of his ties with Yoknapatawpha County, not in spite of his Southern heritage, but *because* of what he drew from his Southern heritage, he was able to transcend the constriction of his national myth and find his place in the great central tradition of Western civilization.